

## A Brief Story of Maceo Snipes: An American Hero



Maceo Snipes was born March 28, 1909 to Lula and John Snipes in Taylor County, Georgia. As a farmer, he worked his father's land until he was drafted into the army February 8, 1943. He was decorated with an Asiatic Pacific Service Medal and discharged September 4, 1945 (a copy of Maceo's honorable discharge may be found in the Taylor County Courthouse).

The first and only black to vote in Taylor County in 1946 was Maceo Snipes, a brave soldier who fought valiantly for his country overseas but was denied his basic rights as a citizen of this country. The Klu Klux Klan had warned the first black to vote in Taylor County would be attacked.

In 1946, a Georgia Supreme Court case, Chapman vs. King, found the Georgia white only primary illegal. As a result, many Blacks registered to vote. Maceo must have thought as a citizen of the United States and a WWII veteran he surely had the right to vote. In 1867 Maceo's grandfather had signed an oath he was a citizen of the United States and paid his poll tax so he could vote. Following his grandfather's example, Uncle Maceo cast his vote in the Georgia State Democratic Primary July 17, 1946. On July 18, 1946, 4 white men, reportedly members of the local Klan, drove up to the farmhouse and called Maceo outside as he was eating supper with his mother, Lula Snipes. When his mother heard the shots she looked up and saw her son coming thru the screen door bleeding from his stomach. He had been shot in the back, striking the left upper shoulder and left side as he had walked up the steps. She helped him in, got ready and together they *walked* up the road to a neighbor's house about 3 miles away.

The neighbor hitched up their wagon and went to Homer Chapman's place for help. Mr. Chapman owned the land on which Maceo's family share cropped. Mr. Chapman drove to Katie's house. Katie was Maceo's sister who was also a sharecropper on Chapman's farm. Katie and two of her sons, Sam and Eddie D then took Maceo to the hospital in Butler. The shooting occurred about 4:00 in the afternoon and they got to the hospital about 10:00 pm where Dr. Montgomery performed surgery to remove the bullets but refused to give Maceo the blood he needed to survive. According to family members, they were told the hospital did not have any "black blood" to give him. He was pronounced dead 2 days later around 4:15 by Dr. Montgomery. He died from exsanguination, a lack of blood caused by the shooting.

After his death, the message was circulated that if any family showed up for the funeral

they would also be shot. Because of the fear and threats, Maceo's body was taken under the dark of night and buried in an unmarked grave in order to protect the family and to stop the murderers of Maceo from desecrating his body. Mr. McDougald, the funeral director and Maceo's uncle, Felix Snipes, Sr. buried him in an unmarked grave in the Butler Cemetery.

In 1993 Danny Katayama and Gary Hawks from the Jackson Sun in Memphis, Tenn. contacted a nephew of Maceo, regarding this story. He in turn contacted the family historian, Luree Hereford, a grand niece of Maceo. The editor of the Jackson Sun had become interested in Maceo's story after finding a letter written by a young 17 year old Martin Luther King. King wrote an editorial to the Atlanta Constitution regarding the racially motivated murders of two black couples in Walton County and of the murder of the Black WWII Veteran (Maceo Snipes) in Butler, GA. It is believed by historians this letter to the Atlanta Constitution helped start MLK on his civil rights journey. In 1946 President Harry Truman created the President's Committee on Civil Rights partially in response to these murders (article written in 1992 in AJC).

Fear was rampant during the 40's and 50's for African Americans living in the Deep South. Even in 1993 those who were living during the killing remained fearful and reluctant to talk about the lynching with reporters and other outsiders. David Bateman, Maceo's first cousin, now deceased, said he didn't vote until 1954 because of the intense fear of being killed.

In 1945 Georgia abolished the \$3 poll tax which had been used to keep poor blacks from being able to register to vote. Up to this time Georgia was the only state to enact multiple forms of disfranchisement to prevent African Americans from voting. In the end, a jury ruled that the man who had shot and killed Maceo Snipes did so in self defense. To date there has been no justice or retribution for the killing of Maceo Snipes, the first and only black to vote in the 1946 state of Georgia's primary election. Many African Americans have a story to tell in this struggle of freedom....this is one man's personal story of courage, honor, and dignity in the face of hatred, overt racism and fear.

Sources: Direct descendents, electronic library of Auburn Ave. Research Library, ,Beyond Atlanta---The Struggle for Racial Equality in America 1940-1980 by Stephen G. N. Tuck, Murder in the Peach State by Bruce I. Jordan , Atlanta-Journal Constitution, Butler Herald, Daily News

### **Links to major paper stories about Maceo Snipes**

✓ [The Washington Post](#)

✓ [The NY Times](#)

✓ [Associated Press](#)

✓ [World Now Website](#)

✓ [Letter by Martin Luther King Jr to the Atlanta Constitution](#) (written in 1946)

